

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 L-03 INR-07 OMB-01 /028 W

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R 021641Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6561

SECDEF WASHDC

CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GE//AEAGD T

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION NATO

USNMR SHAPE

COMSCELM BREMERHAVEN GE

CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GE

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON ENGLAND

CDR MTMC WASHDC

CDR COMSC WASHDC

CDR 4TH TRANS BDE OBERUSEL GE

CDR USATTGE RODM NETHERLANDS

COMSCLANT BAYONNE NJ

DIA WASHDC

MSCO ROTTERDAM NETHERLANDS

HQ BENELUX TERMINAL/CO/ROTTERDAM

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 3398

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MMOL, MARR, MASS, BE, US

SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION OF GHENT AS MUNITIONS HANDLING
PORT

REFS: A. BRUSSELS 1690 DTG 191750Z FEB 76

B. USCINCEUR 021816Z MAR 76 NOTAL

C. CMAAG NETHERLANDS 051535Z MAR 76 NOTAL

SUMMARY: REF A REPORTED POSSIBLE VIABILITY OF GHENT FOR U.S.
MUNITIONS HANDLING TRAFFIC AFTER EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS BUT
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RECOMMENDED FURTHER PROBE AWAIT RESOLUTION OF ONGOING EFFORTS

TO RESCIND ADVERSE MUNITIONS RESTRICTIONS THROUGH ZEEBRUGGE. REF B CONCURRED WITH THIS RECOMMENDATION AND REPORTED MEETING SCHEDULED WITH NETHERLANDS OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS USE OF TERNEUZEN AS ADDITIONAL MUNITIONS PORT. REF C CONFIRMED NETHERLANDS CONCURRENCE IN USAGE OF TERNEUZEN BUT ONLY WITH CERTAIN EXPLOSIVE AND SHIP DRAFT RESTRICTIONS. IN THE MEANTIME, MINIMAL HEADWAY HAS BEEN MADE IN THE ZEEBRUGGE SITUATION ALTHOUGH A MEETING OF INTERESTED BELGIAN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES HAS BEEN HELD TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT. EMBASSY NOW CONSIDERS FURTHER STUDY OF THE PORT OF GHENT MAY BE IN THE U.S. INTEREST. END SUMMARY.

1. REF A REPORTED RECEPTIVENESS OF GHENT MUNICIPAL AND PORT OFFICIALS TO ACCOMMODATE U.S. AMMO SHIPMENTS AND THAT SELECTED OBSERVATIONS OF PORT BY U.S. REPS ON 13 FEB 76 INDICATED FACILITIES AND CLEARANCE WERE ENTIRELY ADEQUATE FOR MUNITIONS HANDLING HAVE BEEN PURSUED WHILE AWAITING DEVELOPMENTS IN EFFORTS TO RESOLVE ADVERSE AMMUNITION RESTRICTIONS THAT HAVE FORCED ABANDONMENT OF ZEEBRUGGE AS THE PRIMARY PORT FOR U.S./NATO AMMO SHIPMENTS.

2. IN THE MEANTIME, U.S. DISCUSSIONS WITH NETHERLANDS OFFICIALS HAVE RESULTED IN IDENTIFYING THE DUTCH PORT OF TERNEUZEN AS A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE. CERTAIN LIMITATIONS IN TERNEUZEN SUCH AS A DUTCH-IMPOSED RESTRICTION OF 120 TONS NET EXPLOSIVE WEIGHT OF MASS DETONATING EXPLOSIVE, COMPARED TO THE PRESENT RESTRICTION OF 250 TONS OF ZEEBRUGGE, AND LIMITATION ON DRAFTS OF HARBOR FACILITIES, LESSEN THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THAT PORT.

3. THE ZEEBRUGGE PROBLEM REMAINS UNRESOLVED IN SPITE OF LABOR PROTESTATIONS TO MUNICIPAL AND PORT AUTHORITIES, SOME OF WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN THE MEDIA, AND ONE MEETING OF INTERESTED BELGIAN GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES HELD ON 24 MARCH THAT HAS PRODUCED NO TANGIBLE RESULTS TO DATE. BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY IS PURSUING ITS EFFORTS TO RESOLVE PROBLEM IN WAY SATISFACTORY TO ALL.

4. IT NOW APPEARS THAT IT COULD BE TO OUR ADVANTAGE TO FURTHER EXAMINE THE PORT OF GHENT FOR AMMO HANDLING. WORD SPREADS QUICKLY ALONG RIVAL WATERFRONTS AND U.S. INTEREST IN GHENT COULD WELL PROVIDE THE CATALYST IN ZEEBRUGGE AND/OR TERNEUZEN.
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WHETHER IT DOES OR NOT, WE MAY FIND THAT GHENT IS SUPERIOR TO EITHER.

5. ON 30 MARCH DURING REFORGER LOGISTICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH U.S. REPS, GHENT PORT COMMANDANT DE WILDE REITERATED HIS VIEWS EXPRESSED REF A REGARDING THE ADVANTAGES OF UTILIZING HIS PORT FOR AMMO HANDLING. ADDITIONALLY, HE POINTED OUT THAT NO DIFFICULTIES WERE ENCOUNTERED WITH THE HANDLING OF A UK

AMMO SHIP IN GHENT LAST MONTH AND THAT HE ANTICIPATED NO PROBLEMS STAFFING U.S. MUNITION SHIP REQUIREMENTS. DE WILDE STATED UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT IMPASSE SIMILAR TO ZEEBRUGGE COULD NOT OCCUR IN CLOSELY-KNIT GHENT MUNICIPAL/PORT ORGANIZATION AND THAT EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH DUTCH OFFICIALS AND INTERNATIONAL NATURE OF TERNEUZEN-GHENT CANAL WOULD PRECLUDE ANY PROBLEMS WITH MUNITIONS SHIP PASSAGE TO GHENT.

6. IT IS THEREFORE RECOMMENDED THAT USCINCEUR CONSIDER GHENT FOR APPLICATION OF NORMAL ACTIONS REQUIRED TO CERTIFY A PORT FOR MUNITIONS OPERATIONS. A SAFETY INSPECTION BY U.S. EXPERTS WOULD APPEAR TO BE THE NEXT LOGICAL STEP. BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS BEEN INFORMED OF THIS PROPOSAL AND HAS NO OBJECTIONS. ALL SUCH ACTIVITY MUST BE CHanneLED THROUGH EMBASSY BRUSSELS. FIRESTONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MUNITIONS INDUSTRY, SAFETY, PORT FACILITIES, PORT CLEARANCES, MUNITIONS CONTROLS, CONSULTANTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 02 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BRUSSE03398
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760125-1108
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197604105/aaaadmgo.tel
Line Count: 130
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 BRUSSELS 1690
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 FEB 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 FEB 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <27 JUL 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INVESTIGATION OF GHENT AS MUNITIONS HANDLING PORT
TAGS: MMOL, MARR, MASS, BE, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006